REACHING OUT TO SPECIAL CHILDREN IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

by:

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With all that is happening nowadays and opening of classes is coming, how can we reach out to special children? Special Education is now critical in this time of pandemic.

Here are some strategies or ways how to deal or manage special education these days: Trauma-Informed Approach, Moving on to the Online teaching and Universal Design for Learning or UDL.

Trauma-Informed approach to the Teaching - not really a strategy per se, but it is viewing students on how we can really reach out to them. Here we establish a routine. Predictable routine let them feel they have psychological safety. There should also be a clear, concise communication, announcement is done prior to activities to let the learners feel the connectedness with teachers and other learners. Videos are better as parents can assist and can be replayed for better understanding. Relationships and well-being are more important than assignment or completion, or behavioral compliance. It does not mean to lower your standards, but to let them recover from any trauma or situations they are undergoing with this unprecedented time. Regardless of economic status, let the pupils feel their efforts to learn are noticed and appreciated. A sense of safety should also prevail. Encourage them to talk with others and have fun time together. Parents should promote fun in learning and safety. Teachers should promote self-regulation of learners, always have a check on their progress, check how they are. Lastly, self-kindness, be appreciative of what we have done at the end of the day, think more about how we can improve better than losing ourselves with frustrations. Real learning could never grow if traumas are not really addressed to.
Moving on to the online Teaching platform, start the teaching process with pedagogies or learning objectives clear, of course designed to achieve the most essential learning competencies that should be developed for them. Set clear expectations of interaction and behavior. Communicate well with them regularly and consistently through emails, other methods of virtual signals. Be concise and engaging, use games online or apps…so many nowadays offer their platforms for free. For those who cannot do it online regularly active learning could still be done, use of notebooks and modules or recorded activities and lessons, online and offline. Now for assessment, rethink what is applicable to different kinds of learners, dig in, for we are all now new in this rabbit hole together…and cannot see daily formative assessments. Consider other ways to have the children have a real learning every day. Provide special children with real life experiences as they are really in need of life skills and tasks in general.

Universal design for Learning (UDL), scientific insights on how humans learn, can be used for different kinds of discipline. Simplified, it is providing a voice and choice for our special children how they learn. To let them have the option to show ways how they learn and what they know, while of course guiding them and facilitating learning. Here engagement is crucial, all students are provided activities by groups, pairs or individually depending on their preferences, but of course are firm and consistent with how we facilitate learning. Representation, how we present or show concepts, keep in mind the different needs and strengths of our pupils. Last, action and expression, special children require different kinds of action.

How do we reach out and support the severe or complex cases? In the face to face teaching, we can easily do it, but online, we cannot really translate well, so we need more digging into the problem. Rapport and good partnership then with parents are essential and crucial. One may let the parents join the sessions, observe body language, parents then in one-way acts as the teacher’s eyes in monitoring all progress of every learner.
In all, regular classes and especially with special children, we as educators cannot really do it alone, cliché but we really need to establish good, firm working relationship with parents and guardians nowadays to really be able to reach out our learners.

Teaching special children is already hard and with this unprecedented situation we are in, it is even harder. Trauma Informed Approach, Online Teaching and Universal Design for Learning, if efficiently done by effective teachers, will result in our learner's optimal growth, thus knowing, when and how do we make it a reality is up to each and every one of us. We heal as one.

References:

http://www.edsource.org